

Senior Thesis: college students' media consumption and their voting habits



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Summary

College students don't seem to be as politically active as students in the past. Many people wonder if students today really are apathetic or just not as vocal as their predecessors were. The question I posed is this: Do college students' consumption of various media affect their voting habits?

Media organizations need to know if college students are consuming their particular medium so they may develop a strategy to target this group. Media organizations can then also help politicians target the college student population so as to increase voter turnout, especially for themselves.

In contemporary society there are numerous outlets for information. College students may rely more heavily on entertainment media as a source of information than news media. In doing so, the relational communication between college students and political candidates may be quite different from that of candidates and the rest of the population.

Consumers of mass media choose which medium they like best. But in choosing which one they prefer, they may choose a medium that is more entertaining than another medium. Infotainment is a phenomenon that attempts to provide news while entertaining. It links media and politics by focusing on the entertainment factor. Television was created to entertain people, not to inform them. Print media, especially newspapers, inform much more effectively because that's what they were designed to do. Television provides more entertainment than education.

Thus, college students who watch a lot of television, and don't use other media, probably aren't very politically informed. But students that read newspapers regularly are probably more politically informed, which may also cause them to vote more often.

Bemidji State University students do read newspapers, however; most read either *The New York Times* or *The Pioneer*. Reading newspapers makes them feel more informed about political issues. When watching television news shows/stations they typically watch CNN or FOX News. Most college students also vote. However, the majority don't affiliate themselves with any particular political party.

As the amount of television watched per week increases beyond a certain point, the number of students that read newspapers and vote decreases. The number of students who don't read newspapers or vote also decreases as the amount of television watched increases. This research has not determined if there is a direct link between these phenomena.

I. Introduction

In the days of Berkeley circa 1960, college campuses teemed with political activism. At that time students across the United States were quite vocal in their opinions concerning free speech, civil rights, and later the Vietnam War. If one wanted to partake in a rally or demonstration, or even just hear a speaker on a controversial topic, they needed only to find their local university.

Today, however, many wonder if college students even know what's happening beyond the borders of their campus, much less if they care. Are college students really apathetic or just not as outspoken as their predecessors?

The current era has been coined "The Age of Information." And since there's so much information available I sought to find out how much of it college students are absorbing, especially politically related information from mass media. The question I posed is this: Does college students' consumption of various media affect their voting habits? I expected to find that most students didn't keep up with the news and so didn't fully partake of one of their most basic of civic duties: voting.

College students seem to be a politically disenfranchised group. They don't believe that politicians care about what they think or what they have to say. Thus, why should students read newspapers? Articles about the political world may not hold their attention; they want to hear about more funding for financial aid and less about funding for Social Security (yet). If politicians weren't saying anything that students want to hear, then one conclusion would be that students aren't listening. And if they aren't listening, then politicians don't see that they need to bother trying to appeal to students. It's a vicious cycle.

I don't think this is a fair conclusion, however. College students make up a fairly big part of the population. In cities with a large number of college students, they could easily change the outcome of an election. For example, if there were two mainstream candidates for mayor, and one grassroots candidate spent a lot of time trying to get college students to vote, that candidate could win. His/her win would depend on getting the vote from the students, which would take votes away from the other two, and getting just enough votes from the general public to seal a plurality of votes.

When Jesse Ventura won the Minnesota gubernatorial race in 1998, it was largely due to his appeal to the younger populace. He was a sort of hero for college students at the time. Part of his appeal to college students was due to the fact that he was a former professional wrestler, but the point is that he mobilized a specific group to vote for him. College students made a huge impact on that election; their votes, combined with those of the general populace that voted for Ventura, were enough for him to win the position as Minnesota's new governor.

College students can be an asset in passing some legislation. In contemporary Berkeley, California, city council members depend on college students to help pass tax measures¹. Studies have shown that in years with a drop in youth voting, higher education funding is targeted for cuts. In years where youth voting is stronger, that threat isn't as serious. Politicians know that they can't anger any part of their sizeable constituency if they want to be re-elected.

College students also make up a continually changing market. Every year brings new people into that market. Approximately every four years there is a complete turnover. With a population in a constant state of flux, many people fear that that population will have too

much decision-making power during elections. College students may see the short-term effects of their voting decisions, but not the long-term effects that permanent residents do. This is one reason why politicians choose to focus on a more stable and reliable population such as parents or senior citizens.

Even though the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 relatively recently, this age group still is not very politically active.² When the voting age was first lowered, many young people voted, but since then the numbers have dropped. Kurtzman points out that since candidates have appeared on MTV (specifically Clinton and the elder Bush) student voting numbers have increased slightly.

My research will not only be of relevance not only to determine what media college students consume and if they vote; it will be relevant to media organizations and politicians. Media organizations need to know if college students are consuming their particular medium so that they may develop a strategy to target this group. Along with that, they can tell politicians that college students comprise a certain percentage of their audience and charge them for advertisements accordingly. Media organizations can then also help politicians target the college student population so as to increase voter turnout in this population, especially for themselves.

¹ Kurtzman

² Kurtzman

II. Literature Review

When I started to research this topic, I had trouble finding studies that used college students for their sample population. I found many similar studies that focused on the general populace, but few that dealt with college students. The articles I found that included college students were mostly reactions to current events, which meant that they didn't always have factual research to support the suppositions in the article.

In contemporary society, there are numerous outlets for news and information. Audiences almost literally drown in a sea of information. Out of this sea are many different topics that audiences may focus on, one being political communication. Political communication can be defined as "any transmission of messages that has, or is intended to have, an effect on the distribution or use of power in society...it refers especially to such messages directed to or coming from nation states. It can also refer to communication...in any settings where power is at stake."³

Political communication is heightened during presidential election years. Michael Pfau's article, "The subtle nature of presidential debate influence," discusses how televised debates between presidential candidates shape voter decisions and the effects the media have on those decisions. He theorizes that presidential debates are a main source of information about candidates and their take on specific issues.

First, Pfau notes that there are effects that result from the debates and the media coverage that follows debates. He emphasizes that not all media coverage is mainstream; much of the coverage that candidates receive is from entertainment media (i.e. David Letterman, Jay Leno, *Saturday Night Live*). The source of parodies in entertainment media is

taken from how candidates communicate relationally. Pfau determined that relational communication is just as important as the actual content that candidates deliver.

Relational communication is how well the receiver of the message can identify with the sender. When candidates appear on televised debates, voters may judge their performance right then and again later when different media analyze each candidate's performance. This is where relational communication is difficult to measure. Pfau says that content evaluation is much more easily measured because it is very short-term. Relational content has more long-term affects and isn't noticed right away, which makes it more difficult to measure.

College students may rely more heavily on entertainment media as a source of information than news media. In doing so, the relational communication between college students and political candidates differs greatly from that if they watched the original debate.

William L. Benoit and Heather Currie performed research on the 1996 and 2000 presidential debates regarding inaccuracies reported by various media after each debate.

Benoit and Currie posted two hypotheses, which are as follows:

H1. The proportion of attacks and defenses will be higher in media reports than in the debates; whereas the proportion of acclaims will be lower in media reports than in debates.

H2. The proportion of character comments in media reports on the debates will be significantly higher (and policy comments lower) than the actual proportion of policy and character comments in the debates.

I found both of these hypotheses to be very interesting. When I first read them I thought they were trying to say that the media don't simply report what happened during debates, but editorialize their report. However, they were actually hypothesizing that media

³ Schudson

simply choose to focus on negative content rather than positive. Their findings indicated that the attacks and defenses during debates were more heavily reported than other content. One reason for this is that attacks and defenses are original sources of conflict; conflict easily depicts differences between two individuals and sparks interest among others. Thus they reported that the first hypothesis was supported for both years (1996 & 2000), but the second hypothesis was not supported in 2000. There was no definitive answer to why the second hypothesis wasn't supported for the 2000 election. One of their speculations was that media weren't concerned with the candidates' character at that time. Another notion is that the media have mood swings where they focus on one point now and another point at a later time.

Many people will argue the degree to which politics impact an individual's life, directly or indirectly. However, the point is that politics do impact everyone's life. Voter turnout and the subsequent election results are affected by the information that is made available to voters,⁴ which may include political debates. Everyone gets some sort of information about political candidates the difference lies in how and where they get that information.

The Media Monopoly by Ben Bagdikian (referenced by Eisler), reported that only 50 companies controlled the majority of United States mass media in 1983. By the time the 1997 edition of the book was published that number was reduced to ten companies. That number was further reduced to six by 2000: AOL Time Warner, Disney, Viacom-CBS-Paramount, Bertelsmann, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, and General Electric. Each of these also owns many subsidiaries, some of which are international in reach.

⁴ Eisler

With such a small number of companies owning the vast majority of communication channels it's easy to understand how messages can be very similar. The point that Eisler makes is that audiences receive very homogeneous messages because the lack of diversity in media ownership provides audiences with a skewed view of society.

She reports that there are twice as many men on TV as women, very few poor people, and black people are usually portrayed negatively. Contrary to that, white men are usually cast as heroes and have lots of power. These images reinforce ideas of white male supremacy. This relates to political and relational communication in that the images shown are usually of older white men in suits with lots of power. It's a cyclical process where the images of real people support the fictional ones and continue to nurture those ideas.

Another problem with communication and politics is the amount of money that goes into supporting candidates. Huge donations are given to national candidates so that once in power they will favor legislation that is in agreement with big media corporations. The 1996 Telecommunications Act further favored big media in that it allowed companies to own and operate multiple media, as previously noted.

Consumers of mass media choose which medium they like best. But in choosing which one they prefer, they may choose a medium that is more entertaining than another medium. This doesn't mean that what they choose isn't informative; some people may argue that CNN news is the most fascinating entertainment they can find while others may emphatically disagree. Infotainment is a phenomenon that attempts to provide news information while entertaining⁵ it links media and politics by focusing on the entertainment factor. This makes the two (media and politics) inseparable.

⁵ Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Copyright 1994, Springfield, MA.

It is ironic that in this Information Age there is a phenomenon known as infotainment. An infamous example of infotainment is Bill Clinton's appearance on *The Arsenio Hall Show* in 1992 where, in sunglasses and a suit, he played "Heartbreak Hotel" on the saxophone.⁶ This example also displays the concept of relational communication, in that the audience for Arsenio Hall is probably not the same as the audience for a heated political discussion. Thus the different audiences related to Clinton in different ways.

Some researchers argue that mass media further caters to the idea of infotainment simply in the way that information is presented. Sensationalistic stories and images, dramatic conflicts, and emotional appeals all contribute more value to entertainment than to informing.⁷ This notion strengthens the idea that audiences aren't passive, but active consumers of media because they actively seek out shows that they think are more entertaining.

One misperception is that voters are part of a passive group of people trapped by television. Although television is regularly attacked in studies on political communication, it should be noted that the percentage of campaign news stories present in television and newspapers during an election year are quite similar (13% and 15%, respectively).⁸ These stories are similar in content as well; after all one candidate's actions can only be described in a finite number of ways.

A new term – media malaise – describes the effect that modern communication has on democracy. Kenneth Newton defines it as "tending to induce political apathy, alienation, cynicism, and a loss of political capital." Malaise theory focuses on television more than print media. Television was created to entertain people, not to inform them. Print media,

⁶ Brants

⁷ Mazzoleni

especially newspapers, informs much more effectively because that's what they were designed to do. Basically, media malaise suggests that media as a whole are contributing to a slow decline in the integrity of contemporary society.

Television provides more entertainment than education.⁹ However, the term media malaise is used to encompass all forms of media that are used in political communication. Newton quoted Michael J. Robinson, a researcher of electronic media and politics, when discussing the effects of television news versus print news on an individual. Robinson said

...those who 'fall into the news' – those who happen to watch television news because the television is on – are particularly likely to suffer from videomalaise because they do not have the background of a good newspaper and discussion with friends to help them understand and interpret news. Those who turn on the television in order to watch the news are likely to be better equipped to interpret and understand what is otherwise a bewildering barrage of information and conflicting opinions.

The argument here is that the very purpose of television is to entertain thus any attempt to educate via the medium may not be wholly successful. This is where infotainment comes into play. Infotainment attempts to entertain viewers while presenting the news. The problem with this is that by turning news into entertainment it causes the audience to expect all news to be entertaining. This is a continuous problem. If people are being entertained by the news they may not take seriously the information being presented.

Newton further states that modern mass media have a negative effect on government and politics, which is combined with attack journalism to make audiences cynical, distrustful, and suspicious of both politics and media. Attack journalism is focusing on negative

⁸ Stuckey

⁹ Newton

elements in news and causing politicians to mount negative campaigns that focus on their opponents instead of their own platform and merits

Another part of the media malaise is the instantaneousness of news in current times. News information is collected on a global basis and distributed globally as well. The Internet and 24-hour television news channels are a haven for news junkies but literally overwhelm audiences with up-to-the-second facts and details. Stories lack depth as a result of such immediate reporting. Journalists fight to be the first to report on a subject and have to continually update their information to get the “scoop.” This means that they don’t have the time necessary to spend on analyzing information to provide an in-depth report; they simply report the superficial information.

Overall, media impacts political communication just as politics impacts the media. One cannot be discussed without mentioning the other. They are intricately entwined and as each changes so must the other. Both continue to adapt to society’s changes and each other’s changes.

III. Methodology

For my research I only surveyed Bemidji State University students. The findings are unique to this population and may not reflect college students on a national level.

Hypothesis

In constructing my methodology to see if college students' media consumption had any affect on their voting habits, I first had to formulate a hypothesis. I observed that most people who are politically involved tend to read newspapers quite often. Another observation was that I have been told that newspaper circulations are shrinking because young people aren't replacing older readers. College students may also watch television news shows, but that isn't their sole source of information. My hypothesis is as follows:

- H1. Most college students do not read daily newspapers; those who do tend to have higher voter participation rates and are more informed about political issues than those students who do not read daily newspapers.*
- H2. College students who watch a lot of television and do not read daily newspapers tend to have lower voter participation and are much less informed when they do so.*

When I wrote this hypothesis, I expected to find that the majority of students didn't read a daily newspaper regularly. Those who did read a newspaper regularly I expected to be very politically involved and/or had some sort of vested interest in politics (perhaps they plan to run for office someday).

Television is an entertainment medium. Television news shows do report the news. However, it is quite difficult to inform people about an issue if the medium you're using is one that people are used to using for entertainment. Thus I concluded that students like to be entertained by television much more than they like to be informed by it.

Research Questions

My research questions were written to try to get information to support my hypothesis and answer my main question: Does college students' consumption of various media affect their voting habits? The three questions I formulated are as follows:

RQ1. Where do students get news from if not from daily newspapers?

RQ2. How much political information do students get from entertainment media (i.e. TV)?

RQ3. Does infotainment affect students' voting decisions?

Sample Design

Bemidji State University students were the population for my survey. I chose to use a stratified sample of BSU students so that all major areas of study would be equally represented. In order to get a stratified sample, one class from each major was surveyed. Each class was of similar academic level; they were all 3000-level classes and narrowly grouped within that level.

Large liberal education classes weren't used for surveying. Classes unique to each major were used for surveying to make sure that I received as stratified a sample as possible. Surveying major classes made my sample very stratified.

To conduct my survey on campus I had to ask for permission from the Human Subjects Review Board.¹⁰ This was to ensure that my survey wouldn't have any sort of psychological effect on anyone. I also had to provide a copy of the instructions given to survey respondents and any debriefing that they would receive (i.e. who would see the results, how to ensure anonymity, etc.).

¹⁰ See Appendices 2 - 4 for a copy of permission letter and debriefing information

IV. Research

The first step in conducting my research was to create the survey, which is shown in Appendix 3. It consisted of 15 questions broken down into three parts: newspaper, television, and voting/informed, plus demographic questions.

Next, I contacted professors from each major department to ask permission to survey their respective classes. Classes were selected from the Spring 2002 course list. Twenty-nine professors were contacted and 19 of those allowed me to survey their class. I was able to survey 310 students, which is just under 10% of the student body at BSU.

After completing the surveys, I compiled the information to do a quantitative analysis of the results. Appendix 3 also shows how the survey was coded to allow for data tabulation.

Results

On the survey, the two most relevant questions asked were whether or not respondents read newspapers or voted. The majority response to both questions was “yes.” My results showed that 81% of college students read newspapers and 77% do vote. The following sections show the results of my research broken down into four areas: demographic information, newspapers, television, and voting/informed.

Following those results is a section that correlates the different areas and compares the results of various questions. Please keep in mind that all graphs shown are for the full sample (n=310), unless otherwise noted.

Demographic Information

The majority of respondents were juniors and seniors age 21-23 with no distinct political affiliation; 51% female and 49% male.

Exhibit D1

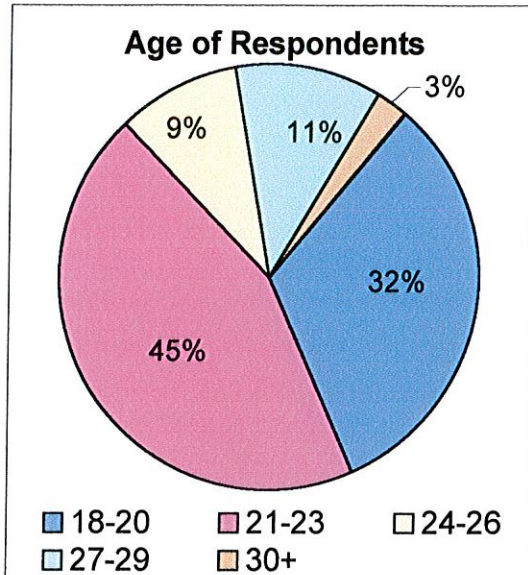


Exhibit D2

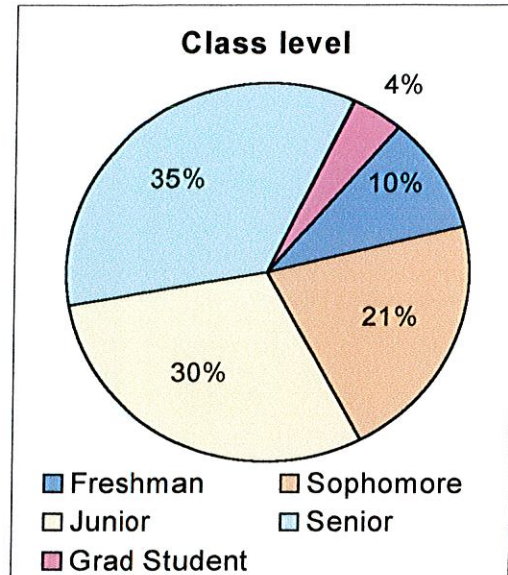


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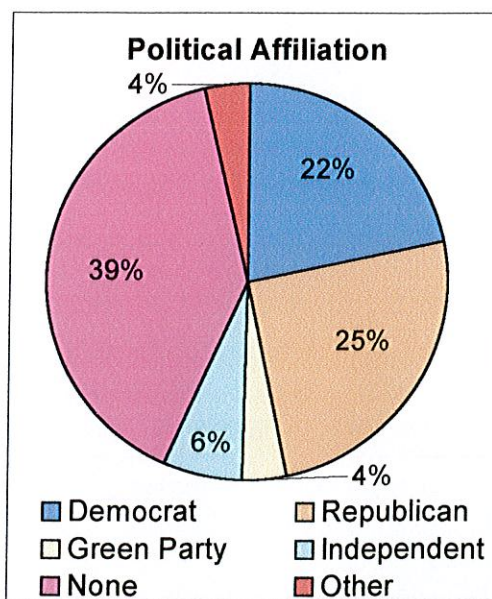
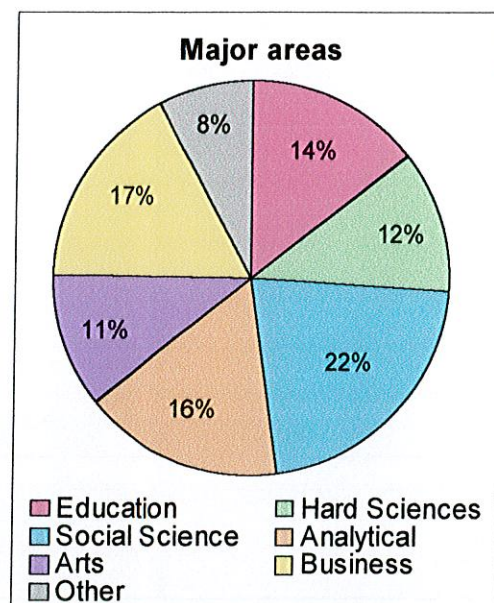


Exhibit D4



Newspapers

In addition to simply asking if respondents read newspapers, they were also asked to list what newspapers they read (Exhibit N1). Approximately one quarter of respondents listed either *The New York Times* or *The Pioneer* as the first newspaper that they read (Exhibit N2). *The Pioneer* is the local Bemidji newspaper. When listing the second newspaper that they read (Exhibit N3), both newspapers were commonly reported again. For each newspaper in Exhibit N1 and N2 the average number of times per week that respondents read the newspaper was 3 times per week.

I speculated about the reason that so many respondents listed *The New York Times* for their top newspaper. I believe the main reason is that many students have to read it for class this year. A few professors on campus were able to work out a deal to make the newspaper available to students at a reduced rate. Until this happened, this newspaper wasn't even available in Bemidji. It is for this reason that I believe the numbers are so high for *The New York Times*. If students weren't required to read it for class, it probably wouldn't have been reported at all.

The Star Tribune was listed most often for the second newspaper. Many BSU students are from the Minneapolis/St. Paul area so it makes sense that they would read this newspaper regularly. Also, it's available all over the state.

There was an interesting note about the *Northern Student*, the BSU student newspaper. It was reported the first newspaper read by 4% of respondents, while 15% of respondents listed it as their second newspaper. Some students are reading it, but it's not necessarily their first choice.

Finally, when asked what sections of a newspaper they read, the front page was the most common, followed by local and national news (Exhibit N4).

Exhibit N1

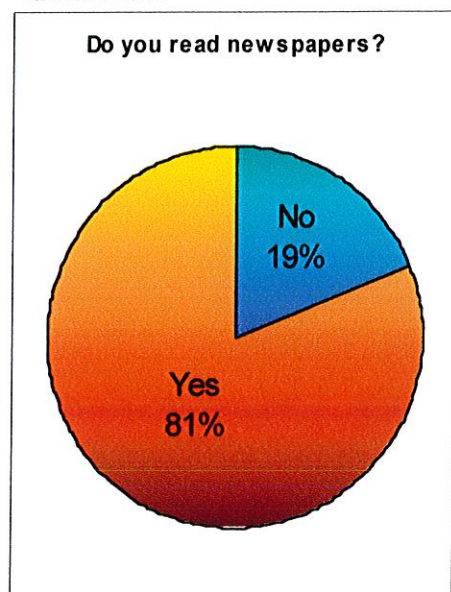


Exhibit N2

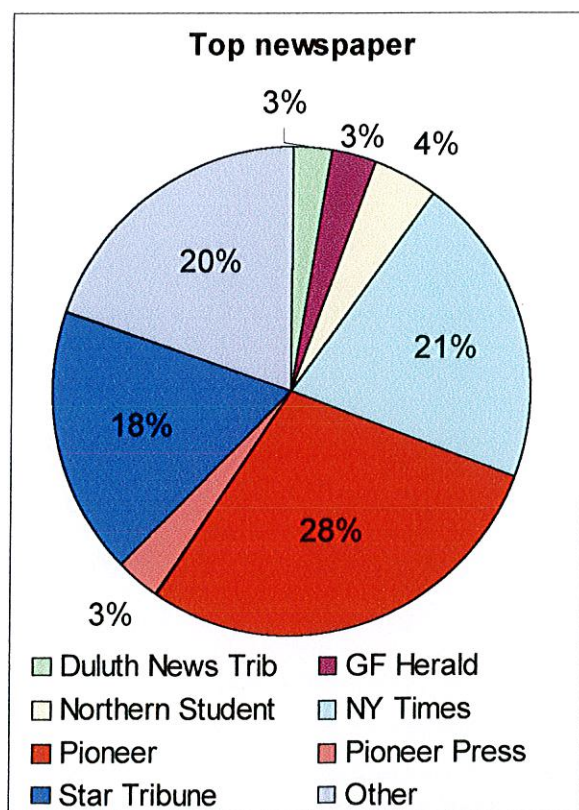


Exhibit N3

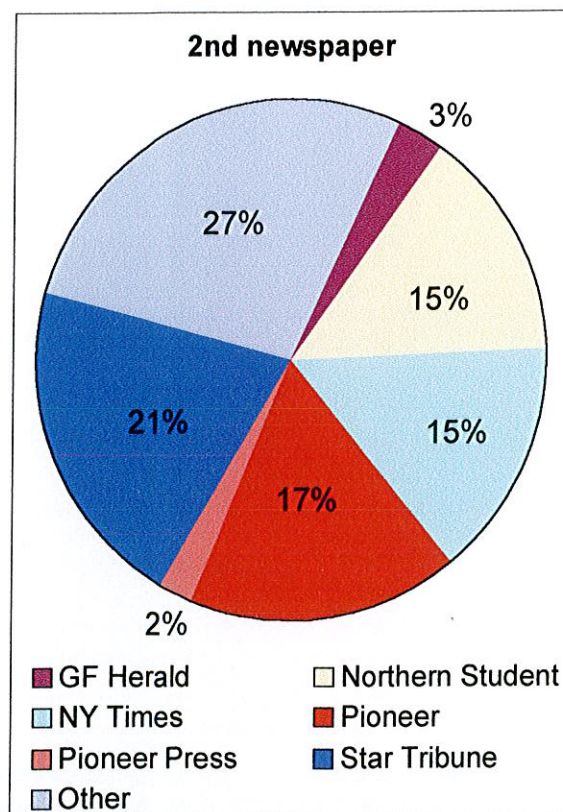
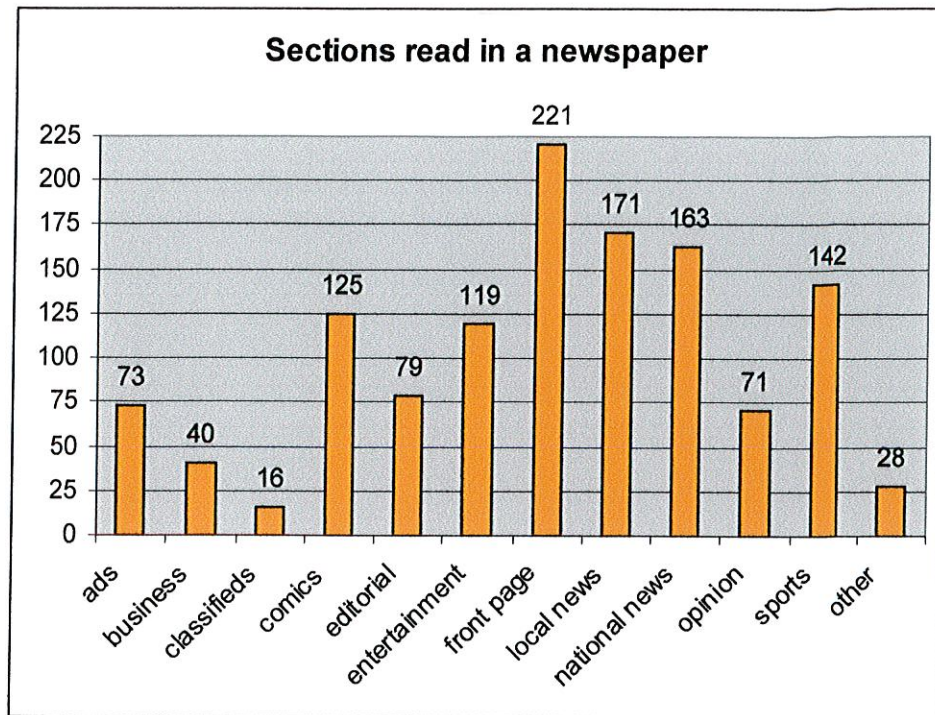


Exhibit N4



Television

When looking at television as an informational medium, I first wanted to know how many hours of television per week respondents watched overall. I then asked what news shows they watched, just as I wanted to know what specific newspapers they read.

Over half the respondents said that they watch television 1-10 hours per week (Exhibit T1). This groups together the 27% who watch 1-5 hours and the 28% who watch 6-10 hours.

Many respondents reported watching FOX News or CNN (Exhibit T2 and T3). These two news stations were reported quite frequently for both the first and second news show/station watched. CNN had 15% as the first show and 18% as second; FOX News had 10% and 17%. For each station, the average number of times per week that respondents watched either CNN or FOX News is 6 and 5, respectively (Exhibit T4). In the "other" category there were many shows listed once or twice. These included what appeared to be mostly hometown newscasts such as KVLV 11, WDAZ 8, or ambiguous answers such as Channel 10 or Channel 12.

After determining if respondents watched television or read newspapers, they were asked to report what other media they consumed and how often per week. Their choices were commercial radio, talk radio, public radio, magazines, TV news analysis shows, TV magazine shows, and websites. Commercial radio had the highest average for per week usage. Websites had the next highest usage (Exhibit T5).

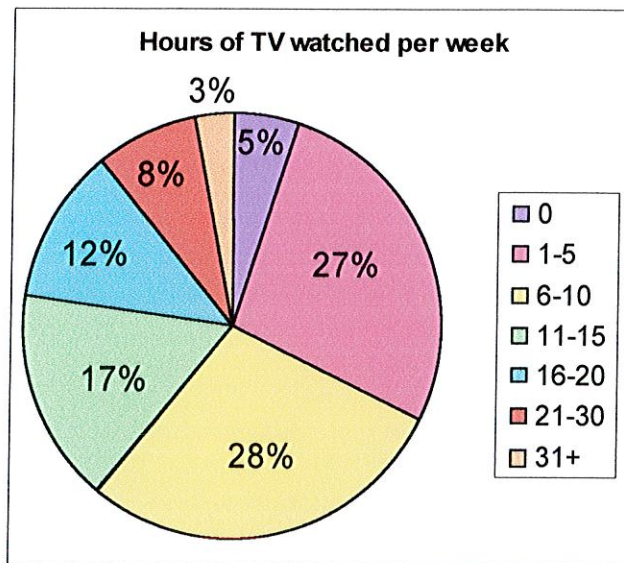
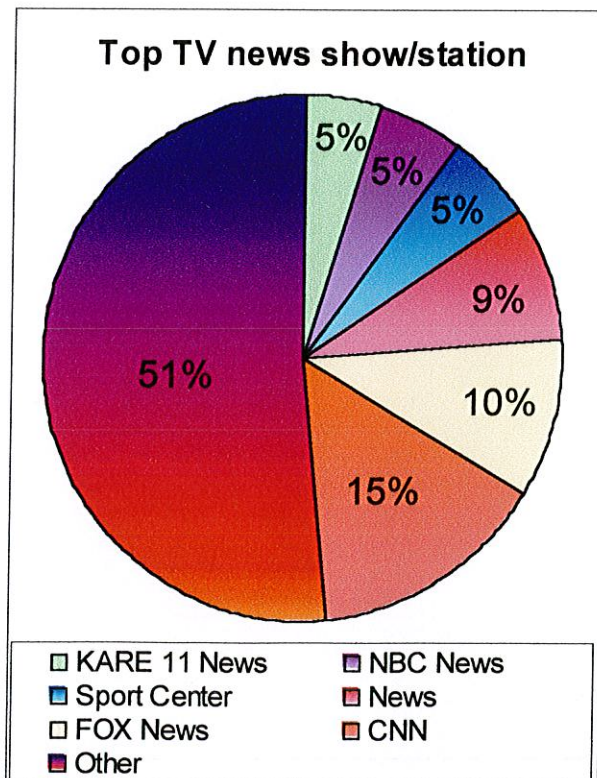
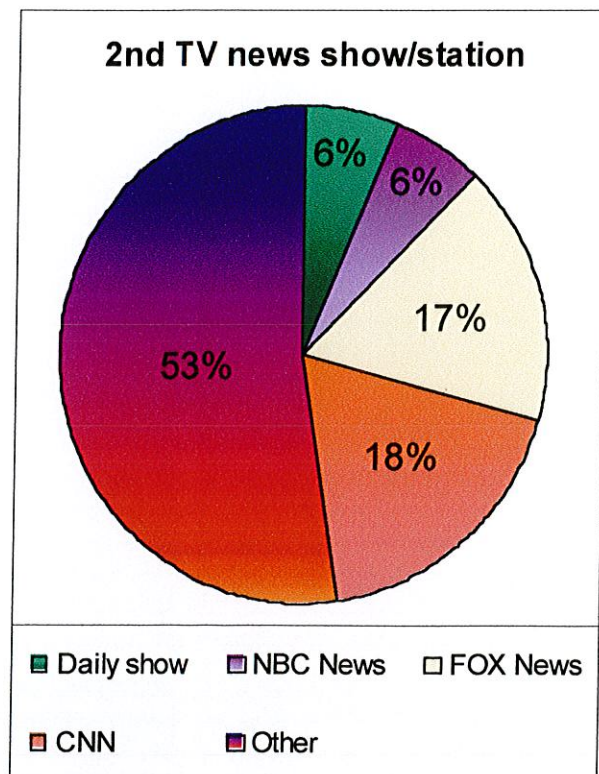
Exhibit T1Exhibit T2Exhibit T3

Exhibit T4

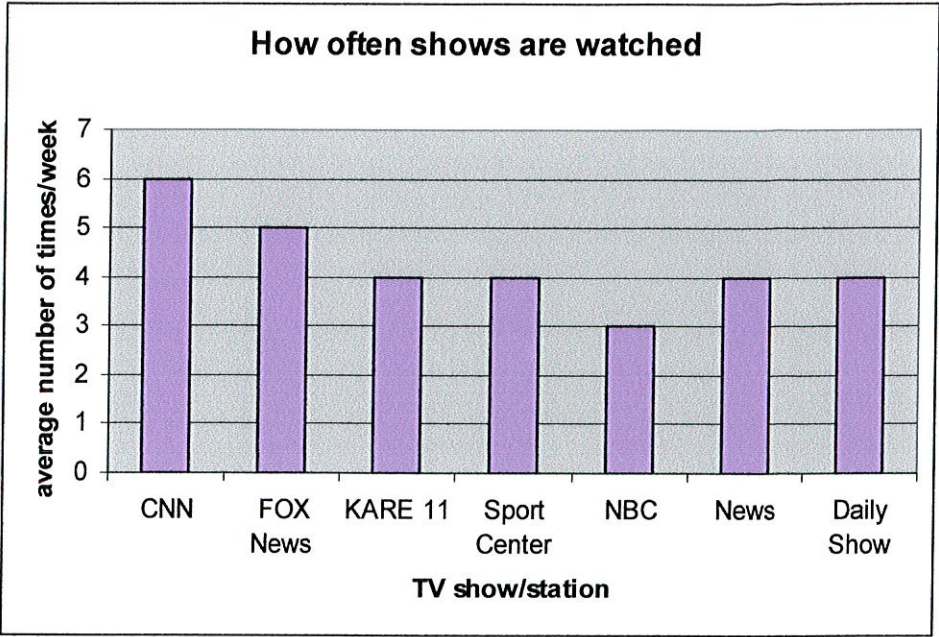
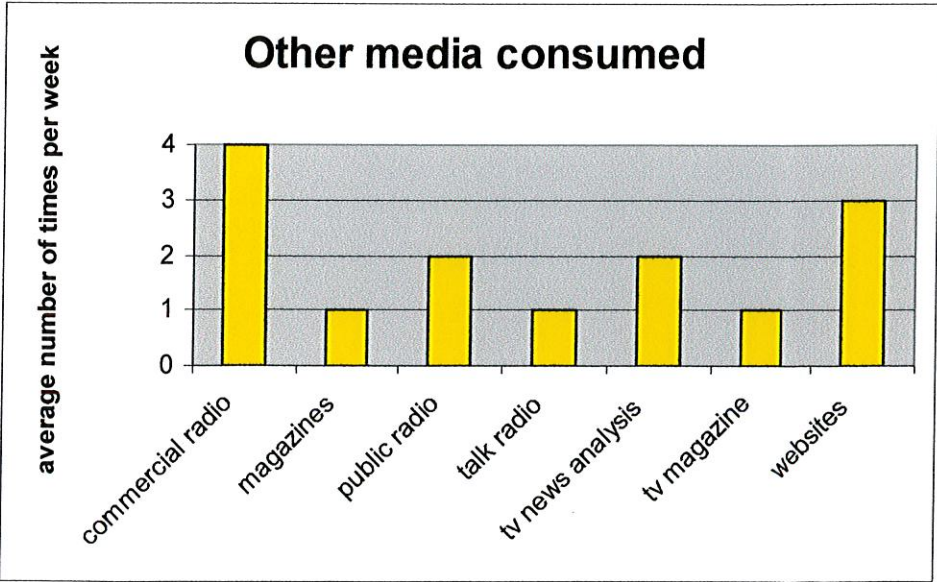


Exhibit T5



Voting/Informed

In this section, 77% of respondents said that they vote (Exhibit VI 1). They were then asked about what factors influenced how they vote and were allowed to check as many choices as they wanted. The top three factors that influence how students vote were candidate stance on issues, personal values, and specific issues (Exhibit VI 4).

After determining if students vote and what affects how they vote, they were asked if they discuss politics with friends or acquaintances for which 74% said that they do (Exhibit VI 2). If they answered yes that they discuss politics they then chose one descriptor of their political conversations from among five choices – bash politicians, casual conversation, heated debate, passing reference, or thorough discussion. Most respondents said that casual conversation was the best descriptor of their political discourse (VI 5).

When looking at how informed respondents felt about political issues, the number who had heated debates or thorough discussions was similar to the number who feel that they are knowledgeable or an expert on political issues. The following brief descriptions were listed on the survey. This helped describe how informed respondents felt if they answered “yes” to being informed about political issues (Exhibit VI 6).

Uninformed – absolutely no idea about political issues

Slightly informed – know the basics of what’s happening

Informed – understand what’s happening in politics

Knowledgeable – can hold your own in a political conversation

Expert – able to participate in an argument about political policy or campaign

Exhibit VI 1

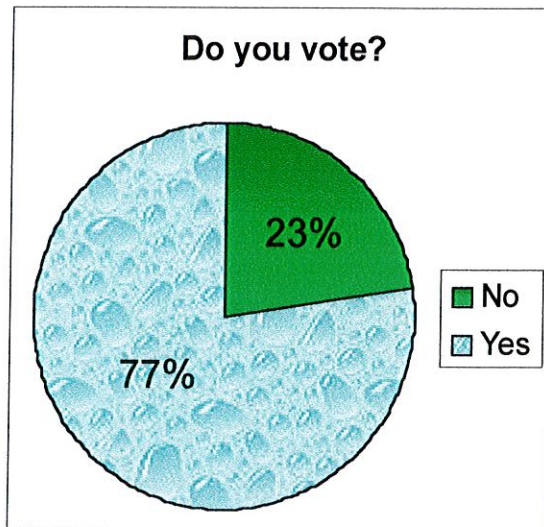


Exhibit VI 2

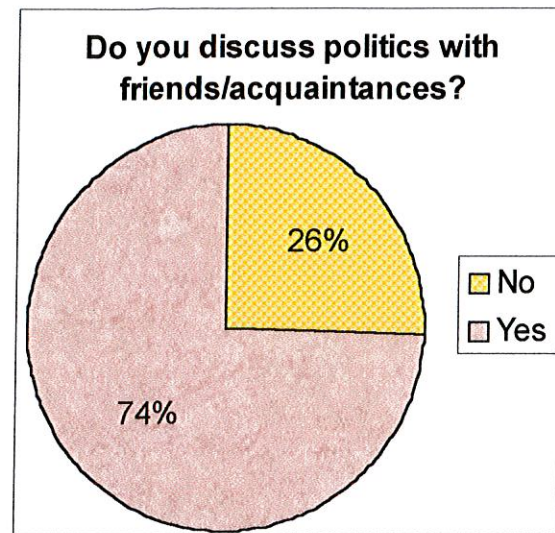


Exhibit VI 3

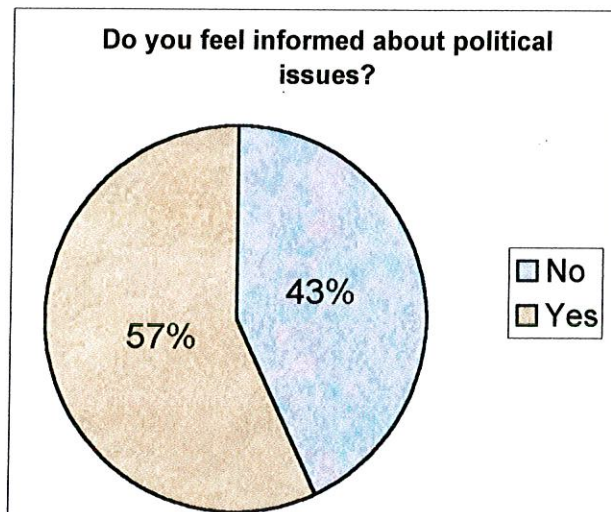


Exhibit VI 4

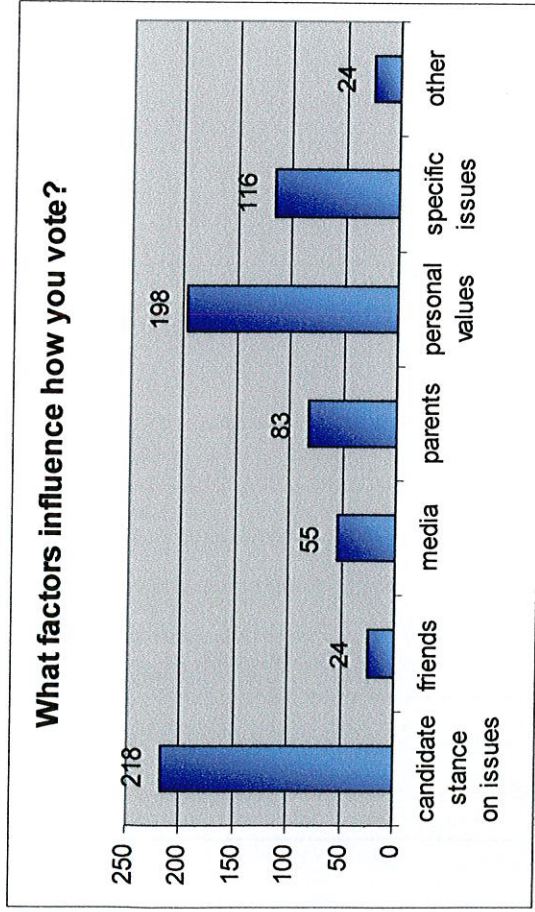


Exhibit VI 6

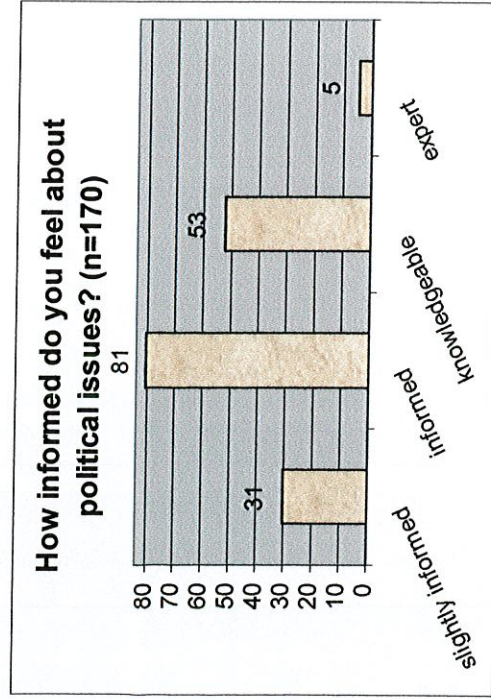
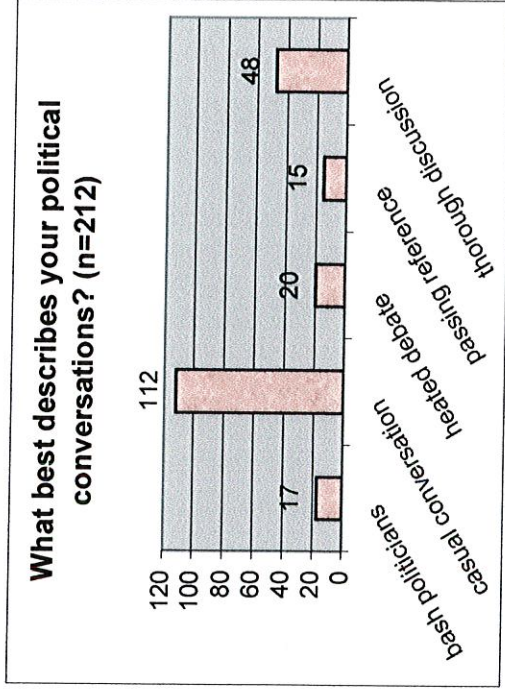


Exhibit VI 5



Comparisons

Before I was able to draw any conclusions from my data, I had to compare and correlate different elements. The first correlation that I made was that of newspaper readers and voters – 193 respondents do both while 16 do neither (Exhibit C1). Next, I found out what political party voters associated themselves with, plus whether or not they read newspapers. Exhibit C2 shows the political affiliation of voters and whether or not they read newspapers and Exhibit C3 shows the same information for non-voters. In the demographic information section, Exhibit D3 showed that a majority of respondents don't associate themselves with any particular party. This is why in Exhibits C2 and C3 that the "none" group is the highest.

I thought that perhaps Republicans would have more newspaper readers than other the other parties, but there were a similar number of Democrat and Republican respondents who vote and read newspapers.

Then I started comparing everything with how many hours of television respondents watch per week. Newspaper readers peaked at watching 1-10 hours of television per week; this group also had the highest number of voters and respondents who felt informed on political issues (Exhibits C5-C10).

Exhibit C1

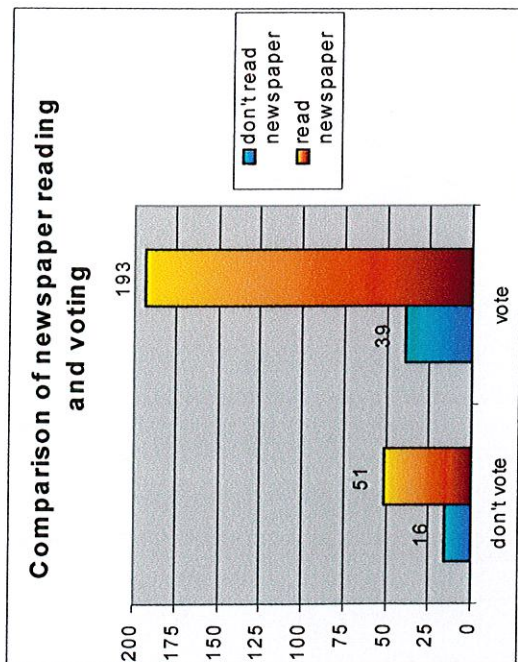


Exhibit C2

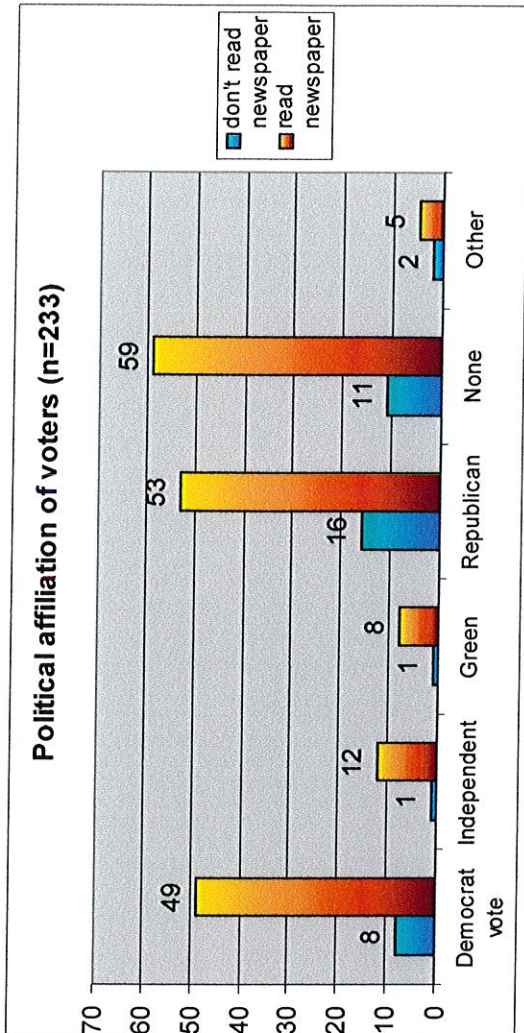


Exhibit C3

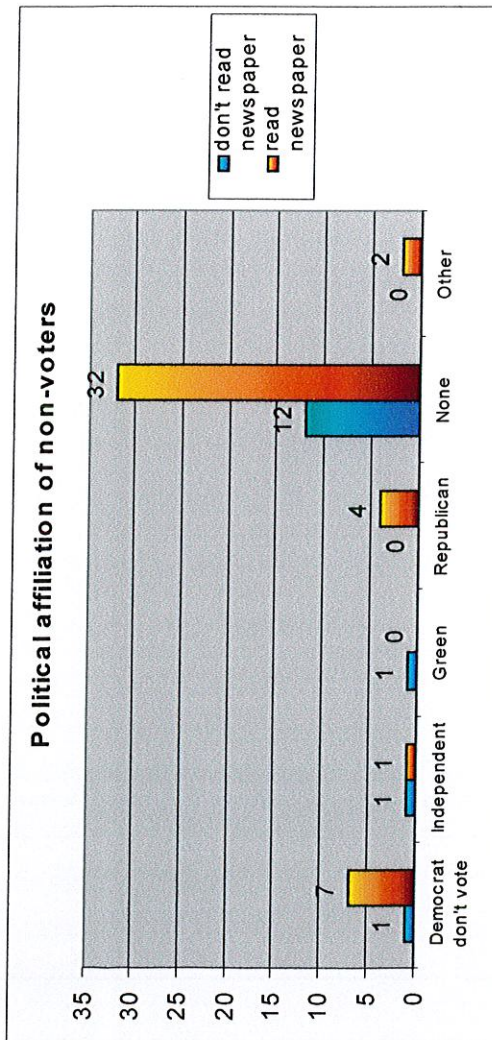


Exhibit C4

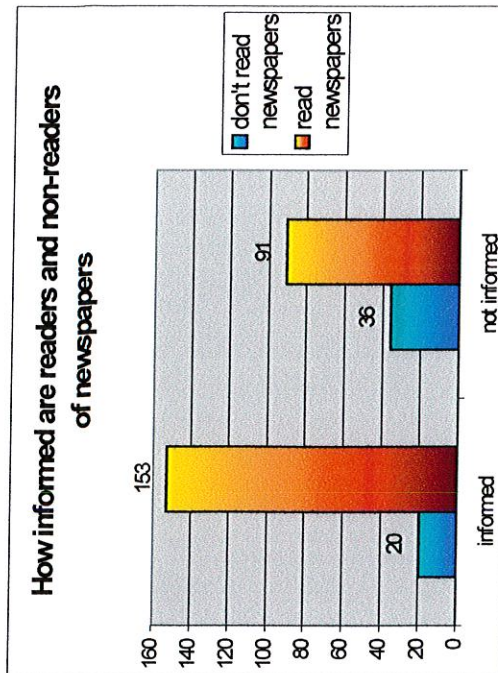


Exhibit C5

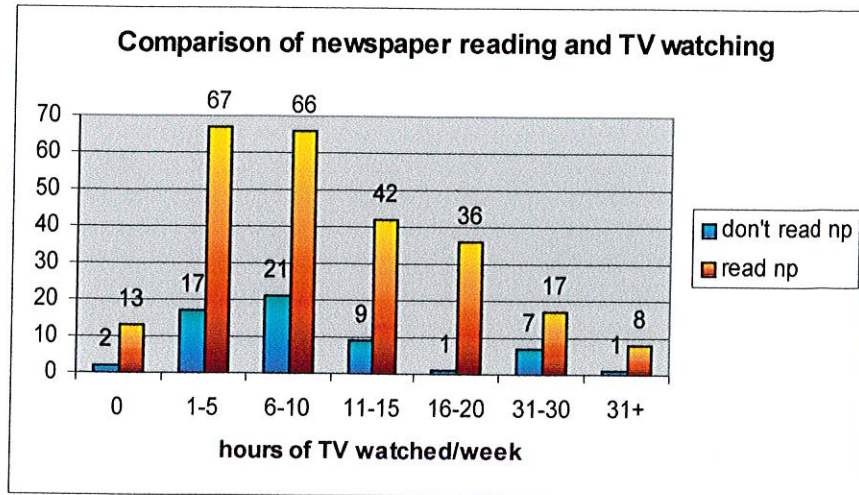


Exhibit C6

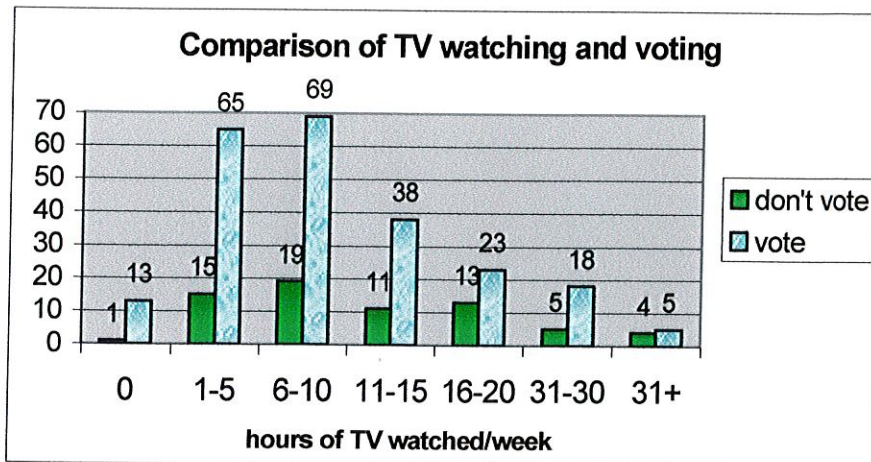


Exhibit C7

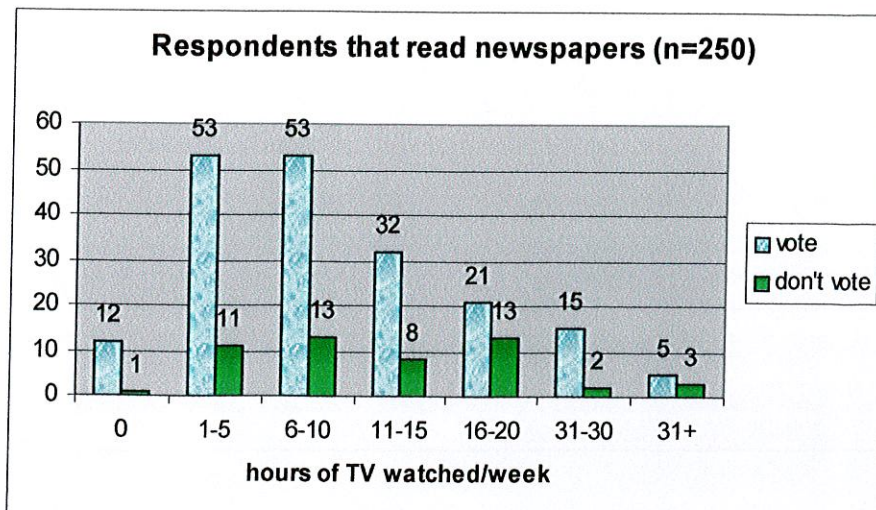


Exhibit C8

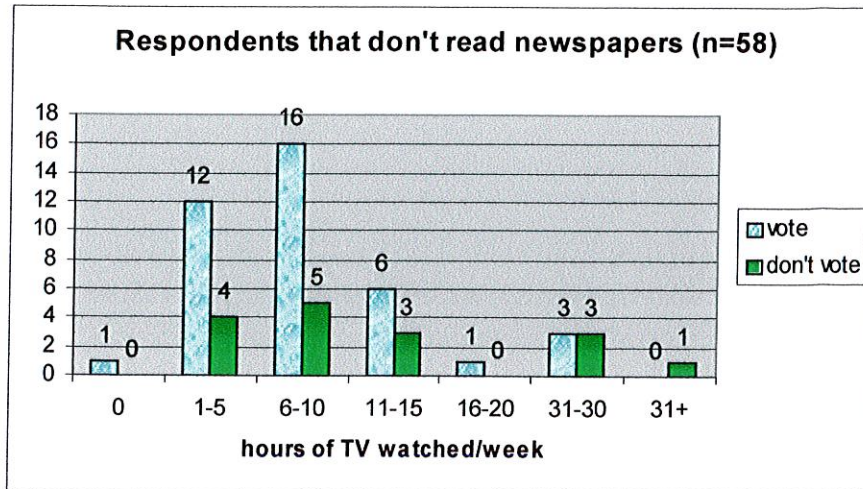


Exhibit C9

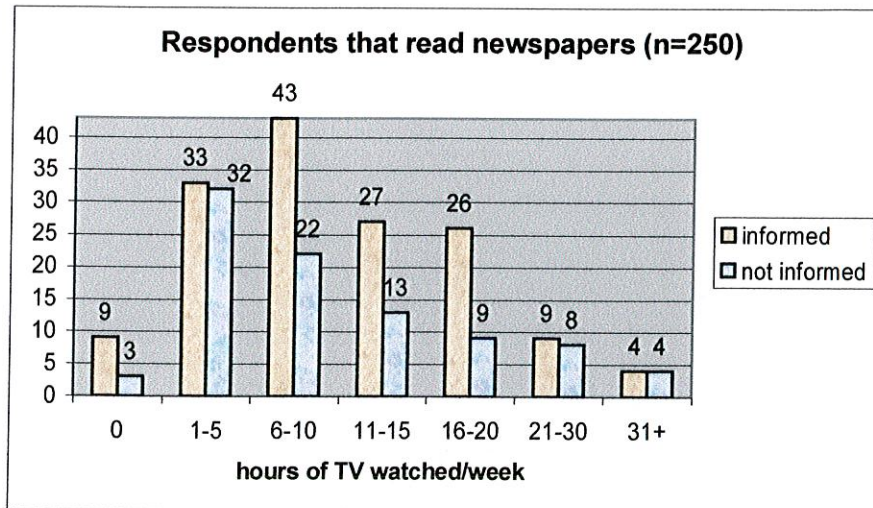
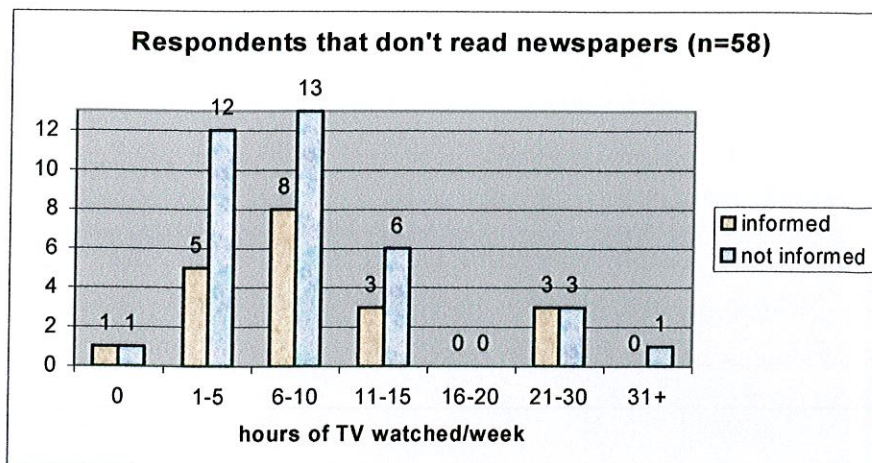


Exhibit C10



V. Discussion

As evidenced by the preceding graphs, my hypothesis is mostly, but not wholly supported. My hypothesis was this:

- H1. Most college students do not read daily newspapers; those who do tend to have higher voter participation rates and are more informed about political issues than those students who do not read daily newspapers.*
- H2. College students who watch a lot of television and do not read daily newspapers tend to have lower voter participation and are much less informed when they do so.*

College students do, in fact, read newspapers since 81% of my sample reported reading newspapers an average of 2-3 times per week and 77% said that they vote. Combined, 62% of respondents both read newspapers and vote. Also, the less television students watch per week, the more likely they are to read newspapers. For newspaper readers and voters, the amount of television watched per week peaked in the 1-5 and 6-10 hours per week ranges. Respondents who felt the most informed were newspaper readers who also watched 6-10 hours of television per week. Thus it appears that 1-10 hours of television per week are adequate to allow time to not only use other media, but perhaps do other things as well. It's possible that if students are watching 20 hours or more of television per week that they're not taking the time to look at other media.

My hypothesis is also supported in that the medium students get political information from does matter. Those who read newspapers felt more informed about political issues than their counterparts who don't read newspapers. Of those who felt informed over seven times as many read newspapers as those who didn't. Respondents who didn't feel informed had

only 2 ½ times as many read newspapers as those that didn't read newspapers (refer to Exhibit C4) .

There is a saying that one half-hour newscast has an equivalent word count of one-half page in a newspaper. When one considers how many words are in a 10-page newspaper the amount of information available in a newspaper compared to a half-hour newscast is incredible. The information presented in television news may not be bad, but the amount of information gained from reading a newspaper is much greater. This also supports part of my hypothesis and that the medium students get political information from does matter. The more information that they get, the more knowledgeable can become, which may make them more likely to vote.

College students seem to watch a lot of television no matter what. Students who read newspapers in addition to watching news on television are getting more variety in the information they receive. Television may give them the highlights of the day's news and they can then read about the details in a newspaper. This may be especially true for breaking news stories. The front page was the most common section that respondents read. This section typically has the day's most important stories, which would also be the lead stories in a television newscast. So while they may get some overlap in information, the highlights may be different.

A candidate's stance on various issues was the most influential factor in respondent's voting. Print media, such as newspapers, allow for contrasts and comparisons of candidates and their campaign platforms. A simple table can be created in a newspaper for readers to easily compare candidates prior to an election. On television such a table would not work well because viewers wouldn't have enough time to carefully look at the table and make

comparisons. Newscasters could, however, verbally tell audiences how candidates' individual views compare.

I think it is important to note that students don't necessarily equate credibility with candidates who try to use entertainment to try to entice them to vote. When asked if they would vote for a candidate that appeared on MTV, 93% of students said no. The majority (71%) didn't care about those appearances while 6% said they're cool and 7% said that it makes candidates look stupid. Thus, even though college students watch a lot of television, they obviously know where to get good news information and where to get their entertainment. Candidates may try to appeal to the youth of America by utilizing entertainment media, but it doesn't always work. This information answered my research questions that students don't get much political information from entertainment media and infotainment doesn't much affect their voting decisions.

Statistical Analysis

To determine the validity of my results I performed a cross-tabulation of newspaper reading with voting and whether they felt informed or not. I then calculated a chi-square value ($p \leq 0.01$) to find which areas had the most significance.¹¹ According to these calculations, the most significant areas are non-newspaper readers who don't feel informed about political issues and non-newspaper readers who do feel informed. Evidently, non-newspaper readers were the most statistically significant group overall. For this group, there should have been fewer who felt uninformed and more who did feel informed about political issues.

¹¹ see Appendix 4 for table of cross-tabulation and chi-square calculations

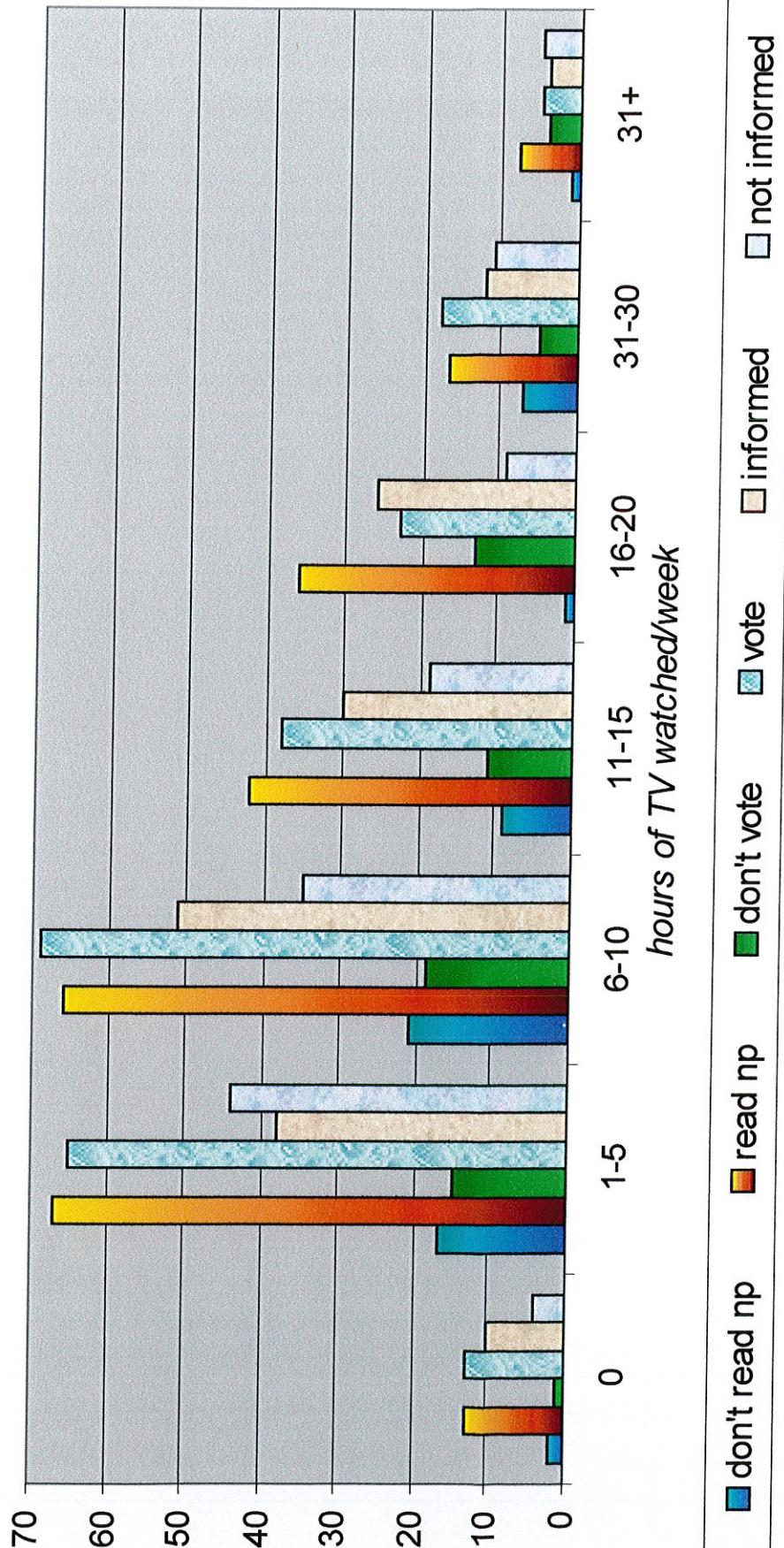
Final Conclusions

As the amount of television watched per week increases the number of students who read newspapers and vote decreases steadily. The number of students that don't read newspapers or vote also decreases as the amount of television watched increases, but not as much. Reading a newspaper regularly may increase voting among students. My research cannot determine direct cause-and-effect links, but I have found a correlation between regular newspaper reading and voting.

The following, final graph shows how each group – newspaper readers or not and voters or not, compares with the amount of television watched per week (Exhibit F). For each range there is a significant difference between those who read newspapers and vote and those who don't do either. The 6-10 hours of television per week showed the most respondents who felt informed about political issues and the most who voted. Unfortunately, this group had the most respondents who also felt uninformed and didn't vote.

Exhibit F

Summary of Results



VI. Suggestions for Future Research

Upon completing my research and analyzing the data, I found that there were still many questions that I had concerning this topic. If given the opportunity I would probably continue this project more in-depth. Here are some of the questions that I had after looking at the results:

- How regularly do students read each newspaper? They average reading a newspaper 2-3 times per week, but are there specific days that they read more than others?
- Why do students read a particular newspaper, or at all? As I noted most of those students will probably not continue to read *The New York Times* once they don't have to do so for class anymore. Are there personal reasons that they read a certain newspaper?
- How much time do students spend on one edition of a newspaper? The front page is the most common section that students read, so do they read only that section or do they take the time to open the paper and read further?
- When watching television, are they actively taking in what's happening on the screen or are they passive viewers? Perhaps they simply have it on for background noise while doing homework.
- Are students taking advantage of online newspapers? Not just online versions of printed newspapers such as *The Pioneer* or *The New York Times*, but online only news groups, or are they just not interested in news at all?

These are the main questions that I had as a result of my research. Most of these questions could be answered by using focus groups. This would allow for more in-depth answers to the questions listed. However, each question could be a separate research project; combining any of them would be too complicated.

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The College of Social and Natural Sciences

March 25, 2003

Dear Peggy:

We have reviewed the cover letter that you plan on reading to the students. On the basis of this new information we approve your request. A copy of the approval form is enclosed. We have a copy of your proposal on file in the College of Professional Studies office along with the original approval.

Thank you for submitting your request in a timely manner. Should you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Dr. Debra Peterson
Chair, Human Subjects Committee

Cc: Louise Mengelkoch
enclosure

Received
Graduate Studies
MAR 21 2003

Attachment A

Bemidji State University
Human Subjects Committee
Human Research Approval Form

Title of Study: College Student Media Consumption + Voting Habits

Date Submitted: 03/21/03 Project starting date: Mar 24 Project ending date: April 15

Principal Investigator(s): Peggy Prudhomme

Address: 360A Birch Hall Telephone: 755-2118

E-mail Address: peggy.prudhomme@st.bemidji.state.edu

Co-Investigators: _____

Faculty Advisor/Sponsor: Louise Mangelkoch

Request: ☒ Expedited Review (include reasons below) ☐ Full Review

My research needs to get under way so that I make complete my thesis

Can the title of this study be made public before the completion date: ☒ Yes ☐ No

All student research must first be approved by the student's faculty advisor. Signature denotes the advisor's approval of the project and must be obtained prior to forwarding to the HSC.

Louise Mangelkoch 3/21/03
Signature of Advisor/Sponsor Date

HUMAN

SUBJECTS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

☐ Exempt Review

☐ Approved ☐ Revise and resubmit ☐ Not approved

☒ Expedited Review

☒ Approved ☐ Revise and resubmit ☐ Not approved

☐ Full Review

☐ Approved ☐ Revise and resubmit ☐ Not approved

Debra Pater 3/25/03
HSC Chair's Signature Date

Appendix 3: Debriefing letter

To: survey participants

I am performing research for my senior thesis within the Mass Communication department. This is a completely voluntary survey, you do not need to take it if you do not wish to do so. All answers will be completely anonymous. There are no distinguishing questions of any kind and the surveys will not be looked at until I begin to tabulate the data. In doing so I can ensure complete anonymity and therefore confidentiality as well.

My research is only concerns college students 18 years of age or older. Thus, if you are a PSEO student or under 18 years of age, please do not fill out a survey as I cannot use the information.

Thank you,
Peggy Prudhomme

Part I. Demographics

Age: ☐ A 18-20 ☐ B 21-23 ☐ C 24-26 ☐ D 27-29 ☐ E 30+Gender: ☒ M Male ☐ F FemaleClass status: ☐ F freshman ☐ S sophomore ☐ J junior ☐ Z senior ☐ G grad student

Major: _____

Political affiliation: ☐ D Democrat ☐ R Republican ☐ G Green Party ☐ I Independent
☐ N none ☐ O other notes

Part II. Research questions

1. Do you read newspapers? ☒ Y Yes ☐ N No

2. What newspapers do you read and how often?

Name of newspaper _____
☒ 1 once/week ☒ 2 twice/week ☒ 3 3 times/week ☒ 4 4 times/week
☒ 5 5 times/week ☒ 6 6 times/week ☒ 7 everyday ☒ 8 Sunday only
☐ 9 less than once/weekName of newspaper _____
☐ once/week ☐ twice/week ☐ 3 times/week ☐ 4 times/week
☐ 5 times/week ☐ 6 times/week ☐ everyday ☐ Sunday only
☐ less than once/weekName of newspaper _____
☐ once/week ☐ twice/week ☐ 3 times/week ☐ 4 times/week
☐ 5 times/week ☐ 6 times/week ☐ everyday ☐ Sunday only
☐ less than once/week3. Are any of the above newspapers weeklies? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Which ones? _____

4. When reading a newspaper, what sections do you typically read? (check all that apply)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> advertisements	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> editorial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> national news
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> business	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> opinion
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> classifieds	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> front page	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sports
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> comics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> local news	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other <u>notes</u>

5. How many hours per week do you watch television?

☐ A 0 ☐ B 1-5 ☐ C 6-10 ☐ D 11-15 ☐ E 16-20 ☐ F 21-30 ☐ G 31+

6. What television news shows do you watch and how often?

Name of show ☐ 1 once/week ☐ 2 twice/week ☐ 3 3 times/week ☐ 4 4 times/week
☐ 5 5 times/week ☐ 6 6 times/week ☐ 7 everyday ☐ 8 less than once/week

Name of show ☐ once/week ☐ twice/week ☐ 3 times/week ☐ 4 times/week
☐ 5 times/week ☐ 6 times/week ☐ everyday ☐ less than once/week

Name of show ☐ once/week ☐ twice/week ☐ 3 times/week ☐ 4 times/week
☐ 5 times/week ☐ 6 times/week ☐ everyday ☐ less than once/week

7. From what other media, and how often, do you get news information? (check all that apply)

commercial radio ☐ 1 once/week ☐ 2 twice/week ☐ 3 3 times/week ☐ 4 4 times/week
☐ 5 5 times/week ☐ 6 6 times/week ☐ 7 everyday ☐ 8 less than once/week

magazines ☐ once/week ☐ twice/week ☐ 3 times/week ☐ 4 times/week
☐ 5 times/week ☐ 6 times/week ☐ everyday ☐ less than once/week

public radio ☐ once/week ☐ twice/week ☐ 3 times/week ☐ 4 times/week
☐ 5 times/week ☐ 6 times/week ☐ everyday ☐ less than once/week

talk radio ☐ once/week ☐ twice/week ☐ 3 times/week ☐ 4 times/week
☐ 5 times/week ☐ 6 times/week ☐ everyday ☐ less than once/week

tv news analysis shows ☐ once/week ☐ twice/week ☐ 3 times/week ☐ 4 times/week
☐ 5 times/week ☐ 6 times/week ☐ everyday ☐ less than once/week

tv news magazines shows ☐ once/week ☐ twice/week ☐ 3 times/week ☐ 4 times/week
☐ 5 times/week ☐ 6 times/week ☐ everyday ☐ less than once/week

websites ☐ once/week ☐ twice/week ☐ 3 times/week ☐ 4 times/week
☐ 5 times/week ☐ 6 times/week ☐ everyday ☐ less than once/week

other notes ☐ once/week ☐ twice/week ☐ 3 times/week ☐ 4 times/week
☐ 5 times/week ☐ 6 times/week ☐ everyday ☐ less than once/week

8. Do you vote? ☒ Yes ☒ No

9. What factors influence how you vote? (check all that apply)

- ☒ candidate stance on issues ☒ parents ☐ specific issues
☒ friends ☒ personal values ☐ other notes
☒ media

10. Do you discuss politics with friends or acquaintances? ☒ Yes ☒ No

11. If yes, what term would best describe these conversations? (check one)

- ☐ bashing politicians ☒ passing reference
☒ casual conversation ☒ thorough discussion
☒ heated debate

12. Do you feel that you are informed about political issues? ☒ Yes ☒ No

13. what term would best describe how informed you feel that you are?

- ☐ uninformed - absolutely no idea about political issues
☒ slightly informed - know the basics of what's happening
☒ informed - understand what's happening in politics
☒ knowledgeable - can hold your own in a political conversation
☒ expert - able to participate in an argument about political policy or campaigns

14. How do you feel about candidates that appear on MTV?

- ☒ they're cool ☒ they're stupid ☒ don't care ☐ other notes

15. Would their appearance on MTV make it more likely that you would vote for that candidate?

- ☒ Yes ☒ No

Observed frequency					total
	vote	don't vote	informed	not informed	
read NP	193	51	153	91	488
don't read NP	39	16	20	36	111
total	232	67	173	127	599

Expected frequency				
	vote	don't vote	informed	not informed
read NP	189.008	54.584	140.942	103.466
don't read NP	42.992	12.416	32.058	23.534

significance values				
0.084299	0.235365	1.031674	1.501903	
0.370614	1.034760	4.535648	6.602962	

chi-square web calculator http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/ballc/webtools/web_chi.html

	vote	don't vote	informed	not informed	Total
read NP	193	51	153	91	488
don't read NP	39	16	20	36	111
Total	232	67	173	127	599

Degrees of freedom: 3
 Chi-square = 15.3972248093441
 p is less than or equal to 0.01.
 The distribution is significant.